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# THE SOCIAL ATONEMENT

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## 1. Physical Suffering

With the advent of sensation came suffering. Perhaps we should say, with the advent of sensation came the necessity of pain. The path of sensibility is paralleled by the tear lines of suffering. Moreover, the acuteness of suffering has increased with the world's growth. The suffering of today is more exquisite than ever before. Suffering is the handmaid, not the Nemesis, of progress. Nature here is a faithful and a reliable teacher. There have been two very marked processes with relation to suffering. One process has provided armor, plates, scales, with the intent to prevent the entrance of pain. A second process seems to have furthered an increase of sensitiveness, that thereby, to speak in paradox, greater sensitiveness, and necessarily greater liability to suffering, might be encouraged for the purpose of avoiding suffering.

Nature seems to have experimented to learn what attitude to take. If the law of the survival of the fittest is true, it seems to point to the conclusion that greater suffering has proven the greater good. The farther we follow the path of experiment the more of sensibility to pain and the less of protective armor we find. The more sensitive organisms have risen to leadership.

Moreover, some forms that were once well supplied with armor have discarded the same and given themselves over to larger liability to suffering. The cephalopods

present an excellent illustration of this. When first known they were well protected by shells. They could easily draw themselves into the shell in the presence of danger. In some cases the walls of protection were peculiarly complete. Their shield system perhaps was the most perfect of any. Had this been found to represent the greatest good surely it should have been continued and perfected. Nature finding it good for cephalopods would be expected to employ it for others. But the case is quite the reverse. The cephalopods did not themselves approve of the close covering. More and more they began to grow out of the shell. The shell became less and less shielding, the sensitive parts more and more exposed. The former shell became a skeleton. The sensitive parts were thrown outward, making the animal more and more exposed to dangers, increasing the probability of suffering, but having this compensation—greater activity, greater adroitness and competence in escaping danger.

The same process may be seen in fishes. Early forms were clothed with armor, the later tribes with finer scales. Those of finer scales have the keener intelligence. Witness the brook trout, as compared with the crocodile. The same fact occurs in animal life. The slow-moving donkey has hide and hair very thick; the thoroughbred racer, the opposite. Compare also a mangey

cur with a well-bred hound. Man, expressing the highest form of development, steps forth with most sensitive physical exterior and yet exhibits the highest wisdom of nature. Sensory nerves are placed in most exposed positions. Pain is most exquisite. The whole sensitive nature of man exposes him to suffering. He suffers pain before the instrument of torture really reaches him.

Dogmatic inference from such a partial study would be unwise. We have not full data. The old explanation that suffering is the necessary antithesis of good is not to be wholly set aside. The fact that some forms of pain seem to be without obvious recompense must also be carefully considered. Yet this much may be concluded from the present data—the use of suffering as a protective agency. Suffering is not a curse on the world. Furthermore, suffering is not simply an antithesis of enjoyment. Physical suffering often results in a positive good. It is a handmaid of progress. It relates vitally to the development of better forms of life. It was a force in the evolutionary process of the creative period. It was and is a law of development. Let us take a step farther.

## 2. Fear as Suffering

A careful study will reveal that physical suffering is only one form, a low form, an initial form, of a method of activity that relates to a much larger range of phenomena. There is a finer and more useful province of suffering than that of physical sensation. I refer to the *mental* suffering developed into wonderful elaborateness in some forms of animal life and especially apparent

in the enlarged activities of man. With the finer organization of the brook trout there is a sensitiveness to sound and a quickness of vision that every fisherman respects. Eye and ear communicate to the brain. Fear is to him a part of his suffering. The deer, in high degree, possesses the same quality. Both are saved through fear. The apostle has told us that man is saved spiritually by hope. The student of nature will add that he is also saved physically by fear. Man, who cannot swim, fears the water. Unarmed, he fears the wild beast. Fear is a form of suffering. That it is often a more acute form than actual physical suffering, no one can doubt. Indeed it seems evident that fear is largely a development of physical suffering. Fear in its best form is a scientific attitude. It is normal, born of man's experience and sense. It is the logic of life. It is the beginning of wisdom. There is another side to all this to be considered in its relation to progress. In the lower grade of suffering, the purely physical, too much suffering, as, e.g., in cephalopod as he came out of his shell, would have been disastrous. So with fish, animal, and man. Suffering is an aid to progress, but too much would be disastrous. The higher form of suffering, the suffering of fear, when developed into extreme disproportion, produces apathy, even paralysis, of movement. That it has often gone to this extent need scarcely be stated. But when the whole case has been well considered we find that in the economy of God's plan the place of fear—a form of suffering—is not insignificant, nor fruitless. Fear is a friend, not a foe to man's advance-

ment. Suffering, both physical and mental, is a God-formed handmaid to progress.

### 3. Vicarious Suffering

We come now to that form of suffering most exquisite, most intense in human experience—suffering for others. This is a form of suffering that is found early, though not in the earliest phases of life, no trace of which can be found in coarser orders of life. It becomes more intense the higher we mount in the grades of life. It is found first in the care of offspring. Fish seem not to have it, for their eggs are deposited and forgotten. The insect feels nothing that can be called motherhood. The bird, in a limited way, has a care of egg and offspring and loves the mate. Here we are safe in beginning our observations. There is, in the bird, a true sense of motherhood that extends at least over the age of helplessness. In the loving attention of the parent bird to her young and her evident solicitude for their protection we find a kind of suffering more delicate and intense than the suffering of fear. The mammal has it in more intense forms. The bird will cry for an hour for her destroyed family and in her fluttering express her momentary grief but soon go on as before. The mammal mourns longer for her offspring, hunts for it, and shrinks from no danger to find and to rescue it. Love, here, has a wider range; suffering has become more intense. In the cry of the lioness, robbed of her whelp, and the piteous bleat of the ewe for her lamb, we hear the voice of nature expressing her intenser suffering.

When we study the expression of

parental affection in man we find it the exponent of his better self. The range of affection in man is infinitely larger than in the animal. The heathen mother loves her offspring, at least in infancy. The Christian mother finds no expression of love too exacting for her powers. She crowns her helpless babe with all the imagery of wealth that a cultivated mind can imagine. This love involves suffering unmeasured. Parental solicitude carries one to the verge of the grave. Danger of disease or devils will not prevent a mother from her duty to her child. She suffers with its every pain. Here we find the finest expression of nature's great transition from selfishness to otherism. In no place do we find willing suffering for others more perfectly exhibited than when parenthood asserts itself to its fullest extent in a sensitive Christian mother. The mother lives in her child and for her child and no form of pain that relates to the body, no kind of fear that disturbs the brain, is comparable for a moment with the suffering of a true mother for her suffering child. This, too, is a suffering that crushes the human heart more than any physical pain. The spiritual mother, the true-minded father, knows no suffering so intense as that coming into the human heart because of the sin of a beloved child. Suffering for sin is the most crushing form of suffering. It is a suffering that lays hold of every fiber of the whole man. Not one element of man's nature is left undevastated after a siege of true parental grief over an erring, sinful child.

Love is the chief element of all higher life. The nearer God, the larger is love.

The parent bird fluttering for her young is expressing the law of nature in the perpetuation of species by self-sacrifice and suffering. The lioness, roaring because her whelp is taken away, the bear searching for her cub, the cow lowing for her calf, are all obeying God's great law of altruism, of other-self, by which life progresses. The heathen mother and her more enlightened sister of Christian culture, each in her own way, not only saves and develops her race physically, but, especially in the case of the latter, the moral and ethical development of mankind is fostered, directed, completed by the suffering side of mother-love. Mother-watchfulness, accompanied by suffering sacrifice which saves the child from a fall or a burn, saves the man from sin. Love-suffering is a part of God's generous plan for the progress of the race, and the saving of mankind.

In the regular evolution of nature we found that sensitiveness to suffering had an honored place. The cephalopod found pain a friend, not a foe, and gladly took more to itself. The higher we have gone, the clearer has been our way, the broader our field of confirmatory evidence. In man, above all in Christian man, we have found the efficiency greatest. It is not until we have come to the finest organisms and found the keenest suffering that we have found the most certain evidence of its value as a soul-producing and soul-saving quality. In man, we have found otherism most perfect, suffering most acute, self-sacrifice most common. In man, that is, we find atoning activity most complete, and its saving quality most potent. The more spiritual the man, the more clearly defined the process.

Why then should we not look above and find in the divine Being, whose image we bear, the same atoning suffering? A suffering God is the logical inference from a suffering world. Nature is the expression of God. Man is in his image. The spiritual side of man is nearest to God. Here the law of suffering is most marked and inflexible. The more spiritual the man, the keener the suffering. Is not God under the same law? Nay, is not the law a part of God, an expression of God? Was not the Psalmist right, "Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him"? Even more touching are the words of Isaiah: "As a mother comforteth her children, so will I comfort you."

#### 4. The Suffering of Jesus

Now comes into the range of our vision the most highly developed of men, most sensitive, most spiritual—Jesus. He a revelation, a reduction of God into a form possible of human comprehension—a connecting link between earth as it is and heaven as it will be—a uniter in one of God and man, a God-man, a divine one, more than all who went before or any that have come after, *he* bowed in deference to nature's great law of suffering. From every standpoint, and in every respect, Jesus was a sufferer. But it was not suffering as penalty, it was not suffering as substitution, it was not Nemesis. *It was suffering for progress. It was suffering for development. It was suffering for the kingdom. It was suffering for the reign of God; suffering for salvation; suffering for the world's redemption.*

Now, the suffering of Jesus is the

suffering of God. I care not how you arrive at the conclusion, whether through the most mechanical, trinitarian process, or through the fresher channels of modern study. Our simplest faith teaches us that in Jesus we have the world's fullest and truest representation of God. The supreme lesson of Jesus is the lesson of altruism, sacrifice, love-service. The church has never been wrong in putting emphasis on the atonement. We have simply been narrow in our presentation of the historic atonement of Calvary. We have tried to magnify, while we have really minimized the truth. We have idolized Calvary. Not only have we with Paul gloried in the cross, but we have also worshiped the cross. Cradles as well as crosses emblemize atonement. "Cross-crowned Calvary" is not the only theater of atoning work. Human hearts where God dwells are arenas where love-service and love-suffering are atoning for human sin. Here in the most sensitive, the most spiritual hearts, the destructive sway of sin is being broken. Here in these hearts human development is being wrought through suffering. My contention is for the larger atonement. Atonement is a law, not an accident; a natural, not a supernatural agency; tragically set forth on Calvary, but not ended there. Atonement is a continuous factor in life, an eternal energy of God. I do not suppose for a moment that I am giving an exhaustive exposition of a theological doctrine. Eschewing all theological phrases and methods, I am simply pleading for that view that can see atonement from cephalopod to God—a law that holds the whole world in its grasp. Calvary will ever be sacred; the

cross is the time-honored symbol of atoning work. But that cross should be erected not merely over a church, a creed, a doctrine, but over the entire body of known truth. The cross should preside over every human activity. The cross should have as much significance in science as in theology, in school as in church. The cross should rest on all forms of human activity; for, from cephalopod to God, one method of progress is to be found—the law of suffering.

### **5. The Law of Atonement in Social Evolution**

It would be easy to cite many well-known authorities—Kant, Mozley, Mulford, Drummond Fremantle, and others—at this point, but it seems better to push on to the particular application promised in the beginning, namely: that the law of atonement is, in method, the true solvent of the problem of today and should be taught not as a part of an external plan of salvation, but as the fundamental plan, the only one for the complete working-out of the world's salvation socially, politically, religiously. What is law for the unit is law for the whole. God has no double standard and is no respecter of persons. What he laid on Christ, he lays on every man, so far as individual ability can bear the load. What he has laid on man as a unit, he has laid on society as a whole. The law of suffering is the law of social progress.

Moreover, I am convinced that the true growth of society is quite like the growth of the animal kingdom, from callousness to sensitiveness and from sensitiveness to higher thought and

larger affection. Indeed history bears full testimony to this fact. Society, like the cephalopod, once drew itself within its shell—the walls of the city—and closed up every gap with gates. There was an age of the shield, an age of castle, drawbridge, and moat. There was an age of steel armor. Then followed the age of standing armies, the dominance of the theory that might makes right. As society became more sensitized it adopted better forms of protection. Cervantes taught us to laugh at chivalry. We pity the people in the walled city, or behind great standing armies. On the other hand, we look with horror at some barbarous forms of life of which our fathers boasted. All this leads me to insist that society's method of salvation is within itself and will take the form of suffering for evil.

There are gross evils of which society is not yet conscious. There are organized evils which men condone as necessary or even defend as right, which in the day of our better development will be condemned and in society's final progress will be extirpated. There is a vast amount of work to do in the first steps of social progress. The social conscience must be sensitized. Society must be made to see and feel the presence of great evils. What some better souls feel all must be made to feel. That which annoys the more Christlike must be made to annoy society. At this point the Christian's work is large. The agitator of society is its angel of blessing. Even an anarchist is not so great an enemy to social order as the condoner and defender of the evil that exists. The sensational preacher is better than the soporific preacher. The strikers' cry,

though partly false, is more helpful today than the cry of "peace, peace," for there should be no peace today. Peace today is cowardice. The call of God today to his ministry is the same that he sent to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist. There is savagery in society today against which voices must be raised until men become sensitive. Then society will enter the second stage—suffering in fear. In respect to many evils society is now in that stage. The industrial struggle of today, voiced with discordant note even, is a sign of society's advance. Strikes are, in a measure, the pulsations of society's pain. The head must not say to the nerve that reports pain from contact with fire, "Stop your throbbing and go to work." Social philosophers and political rulers who simply cry, "Coerce the striker!" are blind to a great law of nature and of God. We are now at the stage when troops will put down a riot impeding the mail service, but we shall come to a better state by and by when government will prevent the strike by removing the disorder. Nature has a law of healing but also a law of prevention by sensitization. Society must be more sensitive to the ills of men and enforce adjustments, arbitrations, rights, by federal, state, and municipal authorities. Society must be sensitized until no one can cry:

O God that bread should be so dear  
And flesh and blood so cheap!

A bank failure at noon is known in every considerable financial circle in the country before banking-hours are closed. The political world is so sensitive at times that a slip of a sentence can make or

unmake a candidate and a party. When the social order becomes so sensitive to disturbances that an unsocial act in any part, an unjust bargain in any quarter, will send a quiver of pain and alarm through the whole, then we shall be on the road to salvation.

### 6. The Suffering of Society

But we must turn now to the fuller view of this law. No true corrective of social wrong is to be found short of the full operation of God's fundamental law of atonement in its completest activity. *Society itself must enter into the holy of holies of sacrifice and suffering love for men in sin.* Society has not yet learned the true doctrine of atonement. Men, except in individual instances, do not know the doctrine. Christ's atonement must be preached, not as a transaction that "paid it all, all the debt I owe," but as an object-lesson. Calvary must be presented, not as the field where the world was redeemed from sin as a completed act, but where men were shown how to redeem the world from evil. When men today sit over against Jerusalem and weep; when men today bear the sins of unholy traffic on their hearts, as Christ felt the desecration of the temple; when men love one another as Christ loved men, we shall enter the last campaign of social progress. Every Christian man must become atoning energy for industrial, social, political, and individual sin. Nothing less than this will be adequate to the world's salvation. Love-suffering expressed in service is God's method of salvation. The Jews said: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Christ says: "Love one another as I love you." Some must climb

even to get up to Judaism. Few men love neighbor as self. Yet men will not be truly Christian until they come to Christ's standard and love as he loved us.

It is distressing to realize how far from Christ we are. It is distressing to know, too, that the doctrine of Christ's dying love is sometimes today so distorted that it tends to make men selfish; so garbled in sermon and song as to be bad ethically and bad religiously. There are songbooks today in common use in church services and in evangelistic work that are full of doggerels of selfishness. The law of service has not touched them. Against all this selfishness the whole strength of Christianity should be thrown. Says a noble writer: "The law of self-interest is the eternal falsehood which mothers all social woes." Selfishness is today master of trade, king of society, and holds balance of power in the church. This is not pessimism. It is simply candid statement of fact. Over against all this must come the larger, diviner power of love suffering for other's woes.

How clear an expression of this truth is found in literature. Says Carlyle: "It is only with renunciations that life, properly speaking, can be said to begin." Again: "In a valiant suffering for others, not in a slothful making others suffer for us, did nobleness ever lie." George Sands says: "There is only one sole virtue in the world—the eternal sacrifice of self." George Eliot sings:

May I reach that purest heaven;  
Be to other souls the cup of strength in  
some great agony.

Our own Emerson says: "A man was



born not for prosperity, but to suffer for the benefit of others, like the noble rock maple, which all around our villages bleeds for the service of man." Goethe, wrote: "Everything cries out to us we must renounce, thou must go without, go without, die and come to life, for so long as this is not accomplished thou art but a troubled guest upon an earth of gloom." Matthew Arnold tells us that the secret of the gospel is Jesus' word: "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life shall keep it until life eternal." Hermann Lotze affirms: "No life is moral which is not self-sacrificed for others."

If society is to be saved, individual men must begin to save it, and our first step and every step is love-suffering, expressed in service. This truth must take hold of the churches. It is invidious to enter into philippics against the church. We have had quite enough of them. However, the mortifying fact still stares us in the face that the church today is in no adequate sense making atonement for the wrongs of the world. We need not be scornful of men who have applauded the name of Christ and hissed that of his church. Men in general and in the long run know who love them, who help them. There are churches, it is true, that are trying to have real love for men, and in love to serve them. On the other hand, it has been well said: "Some factories more represent the kingdom of God than some churches, some mercantile establishments than some Sunday schools." When we estimate the prosperity of our churches solely by such petty yard sticks as the size of the congregation, the number in the Sunday school, or the

amount of benevolent contributions for the year, or any general yearbook statistics, we are confessing by the very standards of our judgment that our churches are not the power of Christ to the world's salvation. The churches *are* doing something. Missions abroad are generous, Christlike movements emblematic of true social atonement; our work in some lowly quarters and for certain despised and abused people is all a part of the greater atonement. But with what hesitations and pleadings and ingenious devices are we doing our simplest duty. Great saving institutions, with consecrated men at the helm making noble sacrifice for love of Christ, must plead and beg and beseech and resort to all manner of schemes, pardonable and unpardonable, to eke out a scanty support. True, noble men and women, embodiments of loving sacrifice, are in the sections of social disorder and poverty in our cities, in the black belt of the South, in woodman's camp and miner's village, but how difficult it is to secure the necessary pittance for their support! We must be as generous as possible in our judgments. but we must be candid with our facts. A study of the churches today forces us to believe them in many instances to be parasites on society, when they should be the leaven of social salvation. The reason is simple. Churches as a whole have not learned that "he that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life shall keep it to the eternal life." There is the secret. When the church enters into the higher life of atonement for sin; when it becomes Christian in the sense of doing Christ's work; when it takes up the cross and goes out to

make every garden a Gethsemane, and every hill a Calvary; when the church suffers in true love for social wrong; when the church begins to mother society and take human woes to heart, her own life will be saved. The solution of every social problem of the times will begin at once if Christians will but follow Christ. The claim of God on Christ is the claim he makes on all. *The call of Christ to the church is the call of Calvary: Sacrifice.*

### 7. The Call of Calvary

We must go one step farther. Government must be touched by the great doctrine of love-service. It was a great step forward when the best governments accepted the doctrine that government exists for the governed. That step needs only to be carried a little farther. Benjamin Franklin held that "whoever should introduce the primitive principles of Christianity into government would change all society." Mulford, in his *Republic of God* said: "The nation has its foundation, its unity, order, and freedom laid in sacrifice." Fremantle claims that "every man in a Christian government should consider his office as a Christian ministry." We need no better statements. Government must be converted to this law of Christ, of God.

All these—individual men, churches, governments—must learn this doctrine

of salvation through atoning energy, "salvation by way of the cross." After them will follow school, press, factory, store, farm. Every kingdom is to be subdued unto Christ. Not China and Korea and the Ottoman Empire simply, but the kingdom of finance, the kingdom of iron, the kingdom of brass, the kingdom of gold—every kingdom of the social order, church, club, playground, theater. "The kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." Over every human institution should be engraven the cross.

The call of God is the call of Calvary. Calvary gives the world the law of salvation. This law is just as real as that of gravitation, crystallization, or growth. Salvation by love-suffering is as scientific as coloration by sunlight. This is the only price of the world's redemption. Our success can come only by

Toiling up new Calvarys ever,  
With the cross that turns not back.

When social forces conform to this law laid in the foundations of the earth, this law that characterizes all development from cephalopod to God, this law that was revealed in history from Calvary, then we shall begin to see social abuses, industrial strife, and every form of inequality and injustice pass away, and John's vision will be fulfilled and a new heaven and a new earth appear.